

Survey and interpretation of data collected on the employment of trainees who completed an ESF joint-funded training or employment programme in French-speaking Belgium in 2019

Summary of key findings

Introduction

As part of the "**Wallonia-Brussels 2020.EU**" **Operational Programme**, the European Social Fund (ESF) commissioned the the research bureau Sonecom design office, with the support of CRIS(Ulège), to collect and analyse data on the **future of trainees** who completed in **2019** a training or employment programme co-financed by the ESF in French-speaking Belgium.

This study is part of the theoretical and methodological **continuity** of the study of trainees who completed a programme in 2015, 2016 and 2018 (the first three cohorts of trainees as part of the 2014-2020 programme) carried out by Sonecom.

This study is the latest for this program.

Among the **priority areas of focus** of the Operational Programme 2014–2020, this study looked specifically at trainees who came under focus areas 2 ('knowledge and skills'), 3 ('inclusive society and employment') and 4 ('sustainable employment of young people').¹

More than 200 operators organised training or employment activities in 2019. However, four types of operators have organized actions for nearly **60% of the trainees** in this 2019 cohort. This is the

- L'Institut wallon de formation en alternance et des indépendantes et petites et moyennes entreprises (23,6%),
- BRUFOR (14,7%),
- Enseignement de Promotion sociale (13,6%),
- Centres de compétences (12,9%).

A **representative sample of 815 trainees** coming under these areas of focus was interviewed by telephone from May 5 to June 28, 2021, using a questionnaire lasting an average of 20 minutes.

To analyse the data collected, the theoretical framework of Amartya Sen's **Capability Approach** (CA) was used. This approach provides interesting perspectives for addressing the effectiveness of public policies by taking into consideration not just the resources available to the target groups and the subjective and objective functionings/results, but also people's freedom of choice and the conversion factors for transforming resources.

¹ Among these areas of focus, the following measures were considered: 2.1, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 4.1 and 4.2. Anyone interested may refer to the Operational Programme for a precise description of the areas of focus and the measures studied.

This theoretical framework was used to classify the survey's variables into relevant conceptual categories, then to **describe the results** within these categories for each of the variables studied, both across the total sample and according to the areas of focus and zones of the 2014–2020 Operational Programme.

Changes in employment were studied in depth, via an analysis of the situation of former trainees at several moments in time T, and the development of transition indicators and an employment path typology.

For this 2019 cohort, we also discussed the effects of the context of the particular health crisis on socio-professional integration.

Focus was given to the **Youth Employment Initiative** (YEI, IEJ in French), not just via the study of the particularities of this group as regards resources, conversion factors and freedom of choice, but also as regards social integration and employment on a subjective and objective level.

Lastly, using the CA, **three research questions** were formulated to help structure the data collection and analysis: 1. the question of equality of access to the resources jointly funded by the ESF; 2. the question of the influence of conversion factors (personal, social and environmental) on employment functionings; and 3. the question of the influence of freedom of choice on employment functionings.

Description of overall results

The **resources** of the programmes jointly funded by the ESF (duration, content, presence of an internship and duration of the internship, certification and follow-up after the action) as well as the individual resources of the trainees (household budget) vary greatly depending on the focus areas. Unlike the 2018 cohort with shorter programmes, relatively longer programmes are observed in 2019; half of the beneficiaries follow programmes lasting 6 months or more. As in 2018 and unlike the results of the previous cohorts (2015 and 2016), most of the programmes followed in 2019 do not have an internship (52.3%)².

Concerning people's **freedom of choice**, in the decision-making process, the trainees generally have self-determined motivations to enter the scheme, in other words 'intrinsic' motivation determined by the trainees themselves and not by external factors. This self-determined motivation can be professional³ (to have new opportunities, find work or acquire skills) or personal (to pursue a personal project or satisfy a desire for knowledge in general). In fact, hetero-determined motivation – in other words, motivation decided by external factors (by obligation/necessity or to escape something) – are almost non-existent among the trainees (non-existent for 82%).⁴

² 58%, 53% and 44% of the trainees of the 2015, 2016 and 2018 cohorts respectively had no internships.

³ Largely majority in 2018 and 2019 (73% and 82% report).

⁴ The classification used to analyse the data relating to the motivation to start training is inspired by the taxonomy of Philippe Carré. The author makes a distinction between intrinsic motivation (satisfied by the very fact of being in training) and extrinsic motivation (objectives external to the training that the latter

Beyond the freedom of choice regarding entry into the training programme as such, it is important to look at the **job opportunities** that actually arise after the programme as well as 'to the **possibility of choosing** between them. More than six out of ten declare they have not seen any job opportunities since the end of the programme followed. There is no significant variation between focus areas and zones of the Operational Programme concerning this question of job opportunities and the possibility of choosing between those opportunities.

As regards **subjective functionings**, the programme undertaken matched the trainees' expectations fairly well or very well in 81% of cases. This proportion is higher among trainees who have undertaken a programme under Axis 2 and lower among young people who have undertaken a programme under Axis 4⁵. The difference in results by zones is not significant. Unlike the 2018 cohort, the perceived benefit of the employment programme don't vary significantly by areas and it can be observed that YEI trainees expressed more of a very good contribution of the action to their professional integration (26%).

The first job after the programme has generally a strong link with the expectations of the trainees (74% of trainees in this case).

The link between the first job and the programme undertaken is quite important in 45% of cases, and differences in these results is not very significant across the areas and zones.

The number of epistemic or useful benefits and socio-emotional benefits of the programme mentioned by the trainees vary depending on the areas of focus but not according to the zones. However, the difference is not significant in terms of identity benefits according to the areas of focus.

Most of the trainees who benefitted from support after the programme perceive this support as highly beneficial to their career (56% of trainees in this case). As regards the view of their future career, the vast majority of trainees are relatively (or even very) optimistic (84% of trainees).

Regarding **objective functioning**, for the rate of employment, there is a continuous rise in these rates after the programme without, in 2019, unlike the results of the previous cohorts, a slight drop in the most recent period (at the time of the survey). The variation in these rates is more pronounced depending on the areas of focus and zones of the Operational Programme and this in favour of the transition's zone and against Axis 3. The positive exit rates show a similar trend, with major differences according to areas and zones with a higher positive exit rate in Axis 4. As regards rates of access to short- or long-term employment since the end of the programme, access to one or more jobs lasting three months or less vary greatly according to the measures within axis 3 and zones. Across all the trainees, most have experienced at

makes it possible to obtain) on the one hand, and on the other, the motivation to learn (acquire skills) and the motivation to participate (be part of a group).

⁵ 8% of trainees said that the programme matched their expectations 'fairly not' or 'very not' in 2019, they were nearly 17% among the 2018 cohort.

least one period of long-term work (lasting more than 3 months) since the end of the programme (51.7% of trainees).

As concerns the first job after the programme, a lot of the trainees (44%) obtain it after the programme or immediately after (35%) and not during it. These jobs are largely 'atypical' contracts; there are relatively few permanent contracts "CDI" (only 32%) but this proportion tends to increase over cohorts.

A valuation of one or more employment aids was observed in 29% of cases. A link between the first job and the programme undertaken is no longer observed between areas of focus.

As regards the issue of remaining unemployed, a little less than one quarter (23.1%) of the trainees have experienced at least one period of long-term unemployment (12 months or more) since the end of the programme, with a very significant difference between areas of focus but not significant among zones of the Operational Programme.

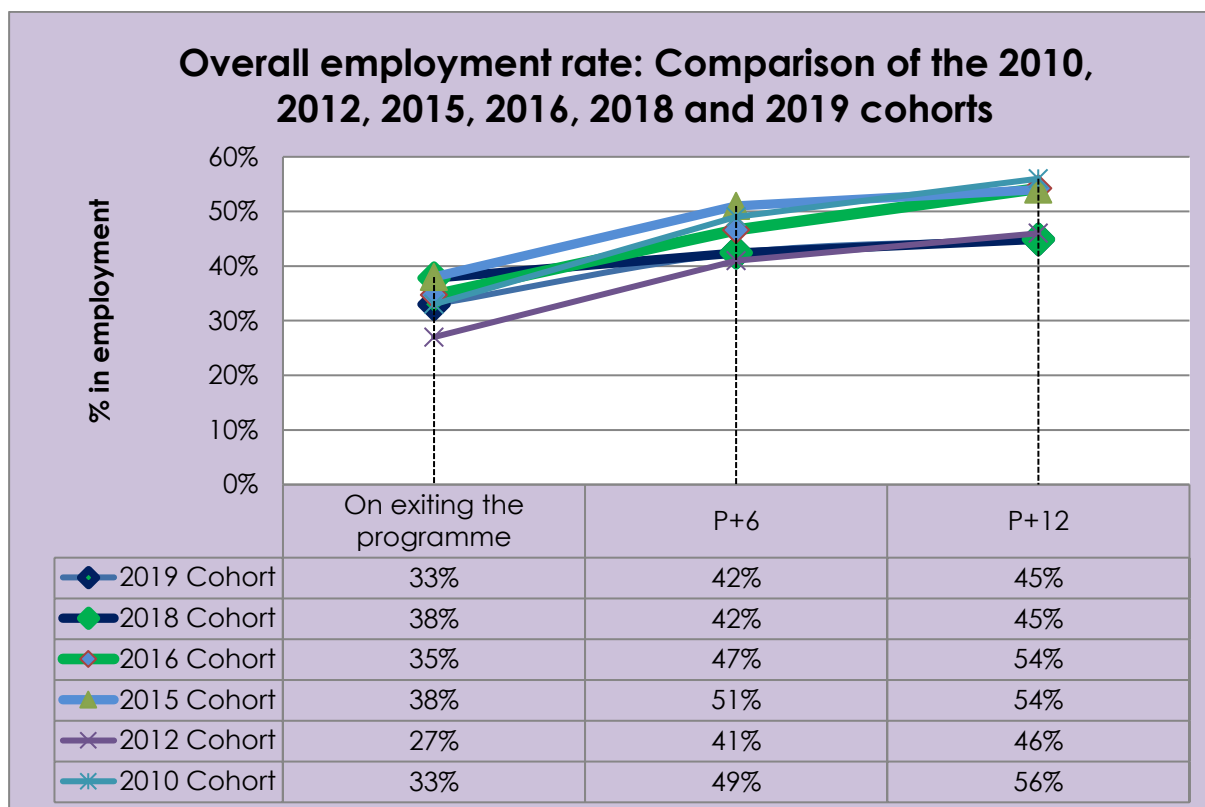
Today, less than the majority of the beneficiaries of a programme jointly funded by the ESF are employed (45%) and more than half of these contracts are permanent contracts ("CDI").

At the time of the survey, 21.6% of trainees had carried out another activity in parallel with their main status⁶, mainly through volunteering in an association.

Trends in employment

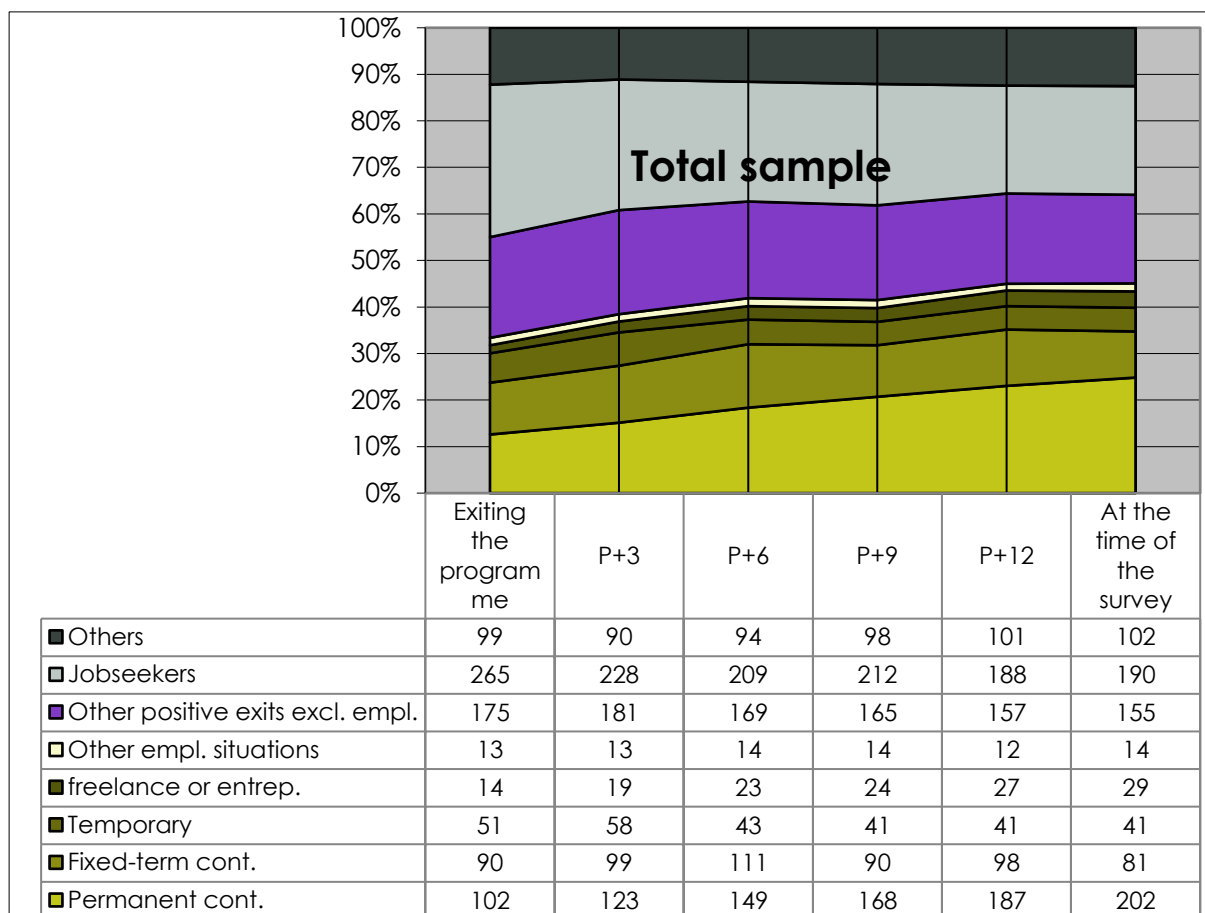
To expand and refine the **specific study of changes in social integration and employment**, the rates of access to employment at several points in time after the end of the programme were compared with the results of previous trainee cohorts. As shown in the graph below, up to 12 months after the programme, the rates of employment are slightly lower for trainees who completed a training programme in 2018 and 2019 than for trainees who had completed an ESF joint-funded programme in 2015 and 2016. On the other hand, they are higher up to 6 months after the programme than those observed for the 2012 cohort.

⁶ They were 22% in 2015, 10% in 2016 and 14% in 2018.



Moreover, different situations relating to social integration and employment were identified at several points in time after exiting the programme⁷. In the graph below, changes in the social and professional integration of the sample studied (2019 cohort) were identified according to whether the trainees had a permanent contract ("CDI"), fixed-term contract ("CDD") or temporary contract, freelance/entrepreneur status, another employment situation (i.e. neither a permanent or fixed-term contract), a positive exit from employment (return to education, voluntary work or travel abroad), job-seeker status, or other out-of-work status.

⁷ For the 2019 cohort, two p-moments were added: P+3 and P+9.



As for previous cohorts, **reflections concerning the transition and quality of the transition** were carried out by creating indicators.

A transition output indicator was calculated to learn about the outcome of the transition process, which could be positive or negative. This indicator shows fairly low regressive transition rates, which cover cases in which the employment situation of the trainee at the time of the survey was less good than the situation at the time of completing the programme (only 14% of trainees in this case).

Two indicators concerning the quality of the transition, one on the **subjective** quality and the other on the **objective** quality, were developed.

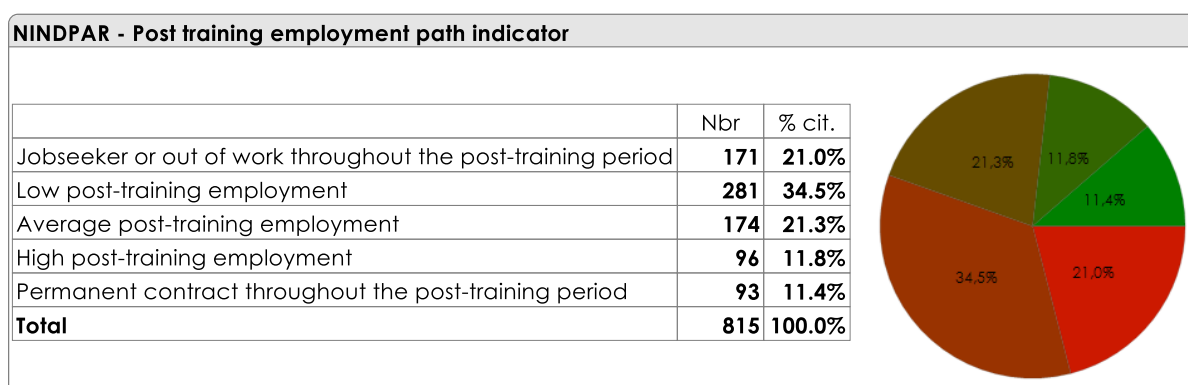
The indicator for the subjective quality of the transition was developed using the variables relating to the chosen or unchosen nature of the programme, the security of the transition (match between the programme and the trainee's expectations and the perceived benefits of the programme) and the acquisition of new skills. The subjective quality of the transition is good in most cases (89% of trainees).

The indicator for the objective quality of the transition was calculated using the variables relating to the support during the transition (support or otherwise after the programme) and on the quality of the resources of the public programme (work placement, training duration, qualification). The objective quality of the transition is low for more than 40% of the trainees and average in 51% of cases.

The analysis was completed with an **employment path** indicator and an outline of the typology of the eight employment paths that appeared most often among the former trainees of the 2019 cohort, as is for the previous cohorts.

The post-training employment path indicator takes into account the types of status occupied (permanent contract, temporary employment or jobseekers) after the programme and the duration for which these were occupied.⁸

The key findings of this employment path indicator are shown below.



Less than one in four trainees have experienced high post-training employment or a permanent contract throughout the period following the programme compared to one in five in 2018. Conversely, however, 56% of trainees have experienced low post-training employment, a jobseeker situation or out-of-work status since the end of the programme.

The context of the health crisis and its impact on socio-professional integration

The context in which the beneficiaries of a programme co-financed by the ESF in 2019 have evolved is undoubtedly marked by more economic difficulties due to the unprecedented health crisis that has affected Europe and the rest of the world.

The analysis of the situation of former trainees at several moments in time T had to be carried out taking into account this particular context of pandemic. In order to measure these crisis effects, a few questions have been added for this 2019 cohort.

In general, just over half of the beneficiaries who left an action in 2019 think that the Covid-19 health crisis has had a rather negative influence on their professional career since the end of the action. This impression of influence is proportionally more negative for the beneficiaries of an action under axis 3 (more particularly measure 3.2, 65.3%) and more neutral for those under axis 4.

⁸ In concrete terms, the following weightings were given to each of the 5 points in time T after the programme: +3 to permanent contract (CDI) situations, +2 to situations of employment excluding permanent contracts (CDI), +1 to positive exit situations excluding employment, and 0 to jobseekers and out-of-work situations. These were totalled and the results were categorised as follows: 0 (jobseekers or out-of-work throughout the post-training period), from 1 to 5 (low post-training employment), 6 to 10 (average post-training employment), 11 to 14 (high post-training employment) and 15 (permanent contract (CDI) throughout the post-training period).

It would seem that the Covid-19 crisis was felt more negatively at the level of job search, so mainly for people who had to enter the job market while the negative impact felt on job retention was felt by proportionally fewer individuals. The impact felt on study and training projects is proportionally more reported among the beneficiaries of an action under axis 4 (49% feel an impact against 40% in axes 2 and 3).

As for the impact on employment, it can be seen that nearly two out of three beneficiaries have continued their work normally⁹, but for the others, occasional teleworking, in 23% of cases, or economic unemployment, in 19.5% of cases, has been set up.

It should also be noted that for just over one in ten beneficiaries this also meant a change of job (12.6%). The loss of employment following the health crisis affecting more than one beneficiary in 5 (12.6% following the end of a contract and 8.4% following a dismissal).

10% of beneficiaries of an action co-financed by the ESF in 2019 experienced economic unemployment most of the time.

When comparing the feeling of job security before the crisis and at the time of the survey, we observe a loss of confidence in job security for 22% of beneficiaries. It remains similar for more than half of them.

Focus on the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) group

The European Union (EU) strategy is to establish the conditions for intelligent, sustainable and inclusive growth. As part of this, the ESF plays a major role in reducing the consequences of economic crisis, particularly high unemployment and poverty rates. The current ESF Operational Programme places particular focus on young people through the **Youth Employment Initiative**. The YEI, which started having an impact as of 2015, primarily aims to reduce the negative effects of dropping out of education and to consider the issue of NEETs^{10,11}.

Trainees in the YEI seemed to benefit from **resources** generally long in duration (at least six months in 71,5%¹² of cases compared to 43.8% among other trainees) and **particularly oriented towards getting into work**. These were focused on preparing for work in a specific professional field (in 77% of cases) and often proposed a placement (63%) that was generally fairly long in duration (more than three months in 63% of cases). In terms of post-action follow-up (from the operator or another organization), trainees under the YEI measure are relatively less followed than other trainees: only 16.7% of YEI trainees reported a follow-up, compared to 21.5% of other trainees.

⁹ More in axis 3 (77%).

¹⁰ NEETs refers to young people who are not in education, employment or training.

¹¹ Programme Opérationnel 2014-2020 « Wallonie-Bruxelles 2020.EU », rapport annuel de mise en œuvre 2014-2020, résumé à l'intention des citoyennes et citoyens, p. 14 ('Wallonie-Bruxelles 2020.EU' Operational Programme 2014–2020, annual implementation report 2014–2020, summary for the attention of citizens, p. 14.)

¹² 37% in 2015, 42.7% in 2016 and 40.2% in 2018.

Regarding **individual resources**, nearly two-thirds of YEI trainees (64%) report that household income at the time of the programme made it possible to close the household budget "quite easily" or "very easily" compared to 45% of other trainees. Also note that 67% of the YEI trainees were living in a household with at least one other person employed at the time of the programme (which was only 41% for the other trainees).

As regards **conversion factors**, the majority of these YEI trainees have few qualifications (71.4% have at the most a secondary-school-level qualification). A vast majority of the programmes undertaken by these trainees took place in a transition zone (97%). In relation to social connectedness, a significant difference is observed between the YEI audience and others¹³. YEI beneficiaries are proportionally more likely to have a strong connection (21.5% compared to 14.1% among non-YEI trainees).

As regards **freedom of choice**, there are no significant differences between the YEI trainees and the others in terms of professional or hetero-determined motivations. However, in 2019 unlike the other cohorts, there is a significant difference in personal self-determining motivations. These motivations (personal self-determining) are strong for 31.7% of YEI trainees compared to 22.7% for other trainees.

In view of employment **opportunities** since the end of the programme, there are no significant differences between the YEI public and the others.

In terms of **subjective functioning**, 74% of YEI trainees said that the programme matched their expectations 'fairly well' or 'very well', and 50%¹⁴ said that the programme had a 'good' or 'very good' impact on their employment.

The first job after the programme also generally matched the expectations of these young people. 77% of YEI trainees report a very strong link between this job and their expectations.

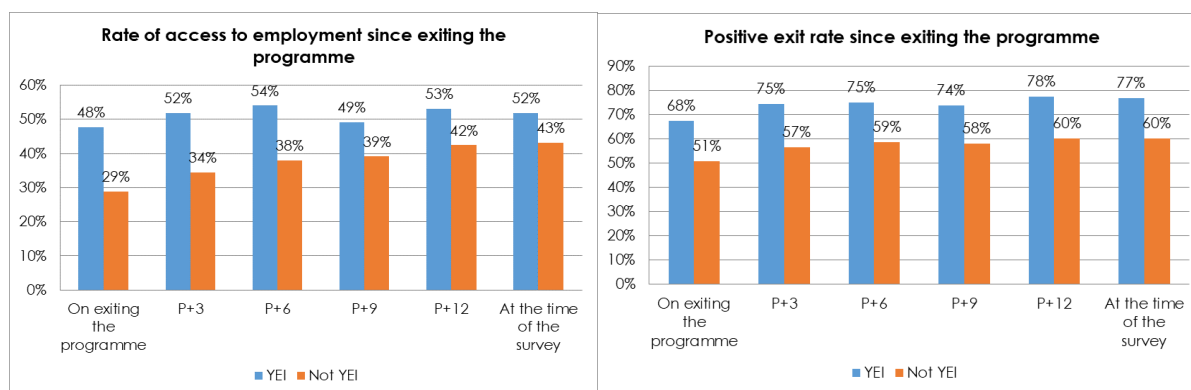
When deciding that the training or coaching programme was decisive in obtaining the first job, there is no significant difference between former YEI trainees and the other groups targeted by the ESF. Among the YEI public, 36.5% declared that the programme was not at all decisive in obtaining the first job, compared to 34.1% among the other groups.

As regards **objective functionings**, as the graph below shows, the rates of employment for YEI trainees in the 2019 cohort are higher than that of the others regardless of the period under review. In the same trend, in terms of positive exit rates¹⁵, the YEI group have also a higher positive exit rate than the others. These rates gradually increase after the programme, with rates stagnating over the most recent period.

¹³ Unlike the other cohorts.

¹⁴ This percentage was significantly lower for the 2018 cohort (37%).

¹⁵ The rates of employment encompass all possible job statuses. The rates of positive exit encompass not just all possible job statuses, but also the return to education, vocational training, voluntary work and travel abroad.



In addition, proportionally more of these trainees have not experienced a period of unemployment since the end of the programme (68% compared to only 55.9% among other ex-trainees). And, for those who have experienced periods of unemployment, they are generally short-lived. Indeed, of the overall YEI group, only 15.9% experienced a long-term period of unemployment (12 months or more) (compared to 25.2% among other ex-trainees).

As concerns the first job after the programme, if the differences are significant between the YEI public and the other ex-trainees in terms of waiting time, the enhancement of one or more employment aids, note that the difference is not significant in terms of the types of contract, work schedule and the choice of this schedule : 44% of YEI trainees obtained their first job immediately at the end of the programme compared to 32% among other public, they are also 33% declaring the enhancement of one or more employment aids compared to 28% among other trainees.

Answers to research questions

Three issues were researched as part of this study: equality of access to the programmes jointly funded by the ESF, the impact of conversion factors (personal, social and environmental) on employment functionings, and the impact of freedom of choice on functionings.

Comparing the profiles of the trainees under the ESF programmes with the profiles of jobseekers in Wallonia and Brussels, ESF joint-funded programmes are not really accessible on an equal basis, particularly as regards criteria concerning age, qualifications and the period of time out of work. Young people, who had a shorter period of time out of work, are over-represented among the ESF trainees in relation to Walloon and Brussels jobseekers.

The conversion factors, be they personal, social or environmental, have a significant influence on subjective and objective functionings.

With regard to these influences, for the 2019 cohort, there is no longer a (very) significant statistical influence of personal factors (age, gender) on employment at P+6 and P+12.

The most vulnerable profiles when it comes to employment were those of foreign origin outside the EU, people with disabilities, with few qualifications or with a

diploma not recognized in the EU and/or who have been out of work for a long period of time prior to the programme as regards the social factors; and people with a low level of social connectedness and poor access to transport as well as people in the most developed zone concerning the environmental factors.

Regarding the question concerning the importance of freedom of choice on subjective functionings, a significant relationship is observed between the perceived contribution of action to employment and the degree of professional or personal self-determined motivations to enter a training programme, between the declared socio-emotional contributions of programme and the professional or personal self-determined motivations to start training and, between the representation of the future and the opportunities of employment since the end of the programme.

As regards the importance of freedom of choice on objective functioning, a very significant link exists between the access to one or more jobs or the unemployment situation and the professional or personal self-determined motivations of the trainees.

Recommendations

This analysis of the data from the 2019 cohort confirms a few general trends in previous cohorts for this programming.

As with the previous cohort, a positive for the ESF Agency is that the rates of employment and positive exit rate increased significantly after the trainees had benefited from training or support programmes jointly funded by the ESF.

However, the overall rates of integration into employment at the end of the action in 2019 are the lowest in this programming (2015, 2016 and 2018) but are similar to the 2010 cohort and higher than in 2012; six months after the programme, these rates continue to decrease according to the cohorts (51% in 2015, 47% in 2016 and 42% in 2018 and 2019). As with the 2018 cohort, significantly lower employment rates at 12 months are observed for trainees of this 2019 cohort compared to trainees of previous cohorts. Besides, if we take into account the areas, we notice that the rates of integration into employment under axis 2 and 3, in the long term, become higher again for the trainees of the 2019 cohort than those of 2018 but remain lower compared to the trainees in the other cohorts (2015 and 2016).

For the four cohorts (2015, 2016, 2018 et 2019), overall employment rates after the programme are clearly higher in the transition zones (Wallonia excluding Walloon Brabant) than in the more developed zones (Brussels and Walloon Brabant).

The same trend is observed for this 2019 cohort with regard to the employment rate and the positive exit rate for YEI trainees. The employment rate among these YEI trainees is slightly higher at the end of six months after the programme than among the other groups targeted by the ESF; in 2019, this rate remains even higher regardless of the period examined after the programme. The same is true for the positive exit rate which is, over time, proportionately higher than that of other public. This finding shows that YEI trainees were the most likely to move towards other positive out-of-employment exits. The ESF could take this into account in the next programming to prioritize programmes oriented toward training for work in a specific field if immediate employment is the objective.

There is also an over-representation of young people in relation to their total representation among jobseekers in the French-speaking Community primarily due to the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI).

The ESF may wish to consider enhancing its programme with a view to rectifying as much as possible the inequalities in access to the resources funded both within the YEI measure and within the other measures. This could be done by attempting to attract as many of those who are most alienated from employment as possible. These are, in general, older people, women, those with few qualifications, with disabilities, and those who are isolated and/or who have had a relatively long period out of work.

These vulnerable groups, already far removed from employment, are also those who are feeling the effects of the current health crisis more and inequalities are thus widening further.